

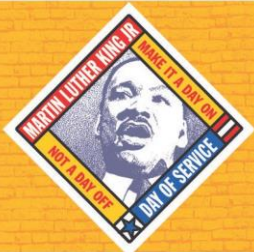
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY OF SERVICE

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** ★★ ★

Project: Send Letters and Care Packages to Troops

You may have service people close to your heart or no connection to them at all. Either way, you can get in touch with the troops and send them good wishes and tasty treats. There are five key components to constructing an effective letter and care package campaign for U.S. troops.

- 1) First, you must find some recipients. Perhaps from among your family, friends, and neighbors, you can identify some soldiers stationed overseas. From there, you can expand your list by writing to the entire battalion.
 - You can also check out [Operation Gratitude](#) to get connected with soldiers. Or see if a local veterans' organization such as the Veterans Administration Vet Center, American Legion, USO, or American Red Cross has a center in your area.
 - Using these resources, you can assemble an impressive list of men and women to write/send to. Also use these organizations to discover what kinds of supplies and goodies are most desirable in the particular place to which you'll be sending.
- 2) You can brighten many lives on the spur of the moment, but for a big scale effort worthy of MLK Day, you need to plan, prepare, and promote. A motivated team that agrees upon clearly defined tasks, sets reachable goals, and acts with inspiration and purpose is key to any successful group effort.
 - Start off by planning with folks you know, and ask them to tell others to join your efforts.
 - Meet regularly, especially as MLK Day approaches, and solicit input from everyone.
 - Assign concrete tasks to keep everyone motivated and on track. There are ways to include all ages in this work; the youngest volunteers can draw pictures while older ones write.
 - Talk about the parallels and differences between service in your community and military service.
 - Seek inspiration for your letters from Martin Luther King Jr.'s own words.
 - Decide what you'd like to send each soldier, based on the recommendations from the organizations serving troops mentioned above.
 - Determine what kinds of supplies you will need and how you will obtain them. These typically include stationery, pens/colored pencils/markers, crayons, envelopes, first-class stamps (for letters), boxes, and tape for packages.
 - Brainstorm about the kinds of greetings, salutations, and topics are right to include in a letter, whether for a stranger or good friend.
 - Create a template of such a letter, and make copies for all of the team members (see letter writing tips below).
 - Solicit funds from team members and/or others, as well as in-kind donations from businesses for the supplies you'll need.
 - If you're planning to include baked goods in your packages, decide what to make and find a suitable location for cooking.
 - Purchase the necessary supplies before the holiday, and make sure to store any perishable goods in appropriate places.
 - Set goals for yourselves, such as numbers of letters and/or care packages sent.



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- Record these goals and make sure you can meet them. Revise them if needed to goals that your whole team can agree on.
 - [Post your project](#) on our site so that people in your area can join your efforts
- **Letter writing tips:**
- Remain positive in your letters. Soldiers are under a lot of stress every day and like to hear positive stories that remind them of home.
 - Remember that soldiers may be men or women, old or young, and of all ethnic and religious backgrounds.
 - Do not discuss warfare or upsetting subjects. Remember, these letters are meant to brighten up their day.
 - If you are writing a letter to an unknown soldier, use “Dear Soldier” or “Dear Service Member.”
 - Be creative. Draw pictures or send photographs of your hometown, community activities, or favorite things from home.
 - Let soldiers know why you think service is important and how much you appreciate their service abroad.
 - Hand-written letters are more appreciated than typed, regardless of handwriting style. Just make sure it’s legible.
 - Write stories about your school, family, or share funny jokes.
 - If you would like to hear back, make sure you include your return address in the letter itself. You may also want to add your e-mail address because many soldiers can respond faster this way. Note that soldiers are not obligated to reply. Don’t feel bad if they can’t reply, as many of them are in challenging conditions.

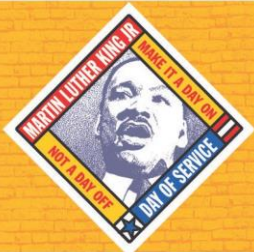
3) Preparing and implementing your activity:

- Make sure project leaders or coordinators are at the site early, ready to greet team members as they arrive.
- Provide clear instructions and constructive corrections, if needed, as the service takes place.
- Hand out letter templates to each team member and set up comfortable writing stations.
- Set up areas to assemble care packages.
- Make any edible goods you intend to include.
- **Sending Letters Out** (special thanks to the U.S. Postal Service for these mailing tips).

Sending to soldiers you know:

Individual letters only need a first class stamp on the envelope to reach deployed troops as they are sent to forwarding post offices within the United States.

Include the unit and APO/FPO (Air/Army Post Office or Fleet Post Office) address with the



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nine-digit ZIP code (if one is assigned). [Click-N-Ship](#) customers should be advised that the postal service and the military will continue to add and update valid APO/FPO addresses for your online labels.

Include a return address

For packages, print on one side only with the recipient's address in the lower right portion or print a postage-paid label online with [Click-N-Ship](#). (Please note that ZIP codes 093XX and 964XX are currently unavailable for electronic labels).

Examples:

Ssgt Kevin Taylor
Unit 2050 Box 4190
APO AP 96278-2050

Sgt Jane Doe
CMR 1250
APO AA 09045-100

Sgt Robert Smith
PSC 802 Box 74
APO AE 09499-0074

Seaman Joseph Doe
USCGC Hamilton
FPO AP 96667-3931

Sending to soldiers through [Operation Gratitude](#):

Individual letters do not have to be stamped or put into envelopes. Instead, gather individual letters (you may want to put them in unsealed envelopes for privacy) and place them in a larger mailing envelope or box. Send the collected letters to:

Operation Gratitude
17330 Victory Blvd
Van Nuys, CA 91406

- 4) After the project is completed, take some time to assess and reflect on it. Think about what went well and what could be improved.
 - Host an official debriefing meeting for team members after the service day.
 - Examine the goals you set and consider which you met, exceeded, or didn't quite reach.
 - Who did your work impact? What did you accomplish? How did it feel?
 - Ask everyone for their honest assessment of what went well and how to improve for next time.
 - Consider what doing this work on MLK Day, in particular, meant to you
- 5) We know you might not like to brag, but please do! You may inspire others to organize a fitness event once they hear what you accomplished. [Share your service story](#). We're listening and want to know what you did and how you feel about it.